Examiners' Report

NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

UNIT A:
MANAGING HEALTH AND SAFETY

JANUARY 2019

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Introduction

NEBOSH (The National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health) was formed in 1979 as an independent examining board and awarding body with charitable status. We offer a comprehensive range of globally-recognised, vocationally-related qualifications designed to meet the health, safety, environmental and risk management needs of all places of work in both the private and public sectors.

Courses leading to NEBOSH qualifications attract around 50,000 candidates annually and are offered by over 600 course providers, with examinations taken in over 120 countries around the world. Our qualifications are recognised by the relevant professional membership bodies including the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM).

NEBOSH is an awarding body that applies best practice setting, assessment and marking and applies to Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Accreditation regulatory requirements.

This report provides guidance for candidates and course providers for use in preparation for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content and the application of assessment criteria.

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General comments

Many candidates are well prepared for this unit assessment and provide comprehensive and relevant answers in response to the demands of the question paper. This includes the ability to demonstrate understanding of knowledge by applying it to workplace situations.

There are other candidates, however, who appear to be unprepared for the unit assessment and who show both a lack of knowledge of the syllabus content and a lack of understanding of how key concepts should be applied to workplace situations, which is an essential requirement at Diploma level.

This report has been prepared to provide feedback on the standard date examination sitting in January 2019.

Feedback is presented in these key areas: responses to questions, examination technique and command words and is designed to assist candidates and course providers prepare for future assessments in this unit.

Candidates and course providers will also benefit from use of the 'Guide to the NEBOSH National Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety' which is available via the NEBOSH website. In particular, the guide sets out in detail the syllabus content for Unit A and tutor reference documents for each Element.

Additional guidance on command words is provided in 'Guidance on command words used in learning outcomes and question papers' which is also available via the NEBOSH website.

Question 1   Accidents and incidents disrupt an organisation's normal operations, adding to the organisation's operating costs.

    (a)   **Outline** potential sources of financial loss arising from accidents and incidents. **(5)**

    (b)   **Outline** benefits to the organisation of effective health and safety management. **(5)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.1: Explain the moral, legal and economic reasons for the effective management of health and safety.

In part (a) candidates gained marks for outlining sources of financial loss such as lost production, fines, sick pay and repairs to damaged plant and equipment. Many candidates were able to gain the maximum marks available for this part of the question. Some candidates did include material on direct/indirect and insured/uninsured costs which was not asked for.

In part (b) candidates gained marks for outlining benefits to the organisation such as reduced costs, improved employee morale and reduced insurance premiums. Some candidates appeared to respond to a different question by outlining benefit of a health and safety management system and introduced material that was not worthy of marks.

Additionally, some candidates missed the opportunity to gain marks by not providing the necessary amount of discussion required by the 'outline' command word.

Overall this question was answered well by candidates.

Question 2   An office employee has been assessed as medically fit to return to work after a serious, non-work-related accident. As a result of the accident, the employee is now a wheelchair user. The Managing Director has refused to allow the employee's return citing 'safety concerns'.

    (a)   Given that disability is a protected characteristic in law, **outline** the advice the health and safety practitioner should give the Managing Director in this situation. **(6)**

    (b)   The injured employee decides to make a claim for constructive dismissal.

        Identify the body that would hear the claim in the first instance. **(1)**

    (c)   **Outline** the orders that the body could make if the employee wins the dismissal case. **(3)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 2.7: Explain the principles of employment and discrimination law as it effects health and safety issues.

In part (a) some candidates gained marks for outlining that the Managing Director's actions were discriminatory, that there are employer duties around treatment of disabled workers, including making reasonable adjustments. However, several candidates provided limited responses beyond these points. Some candidates provided reasonable practical examples of reasonable adjustment for the scenario.

Although the question directed the candidate towards responsibilities of making necessary provisions, some candidates gave wider discussion on how the Managing Director could discuss the issues with the workforce or to have training and information, which did not gain marks.

In part (b) most candidates were able to gain the mark for correctly identifying the correct hearing body.

In part (c) most candidates gained marks for outlining the orders that could be made. However, there was occasional confusion over the difference between re-instatement and re-engagement.

Overall, there appeared to be a lack of knowledge on reasonable adjustments and principles of discrimination law as applied to health and safety issues. Candidates are advised to study this section of the law in much greater detail.

Question 3 For a range of internal information sources:

(a) **outline** how **EACH** source contributes to risk assessment; **(7)**

(b) **outline** limitations of internal information sources. **(3)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 7.1: Explain how to use internal and external information sources in identifying hazards and the assessing of risk.

In part (a) most candidates were able to identify some relevant sources of information, such as accident reports, ill-health data and existing risk assessments and gained marks where they outlined how the source contributes to risk assessment. Some candidates missed the opportunity to outline the contribution and therefore did not gain marks. Others focused too much on the source itself rather than how it could contribute to the risk assessment process. Better answers incorporated a range of sources and succinctly outlined the contribution to risk assessment.

In part (b) answers were limited and focused on the issues of internal subjectivity of the data or concerns about bias, and did not demonstrate a full understanding of the limitations of internal information sources.

Question 4 (a) **Outline** the defences available to a defendant who, in a civil case, is sued in an action for common law negligence. **(6)**

(b) **Outline** what should be considered when determining the level of *general* damages paid to a successful claimant. **(4)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 4.2: Explain the criteria required to establish a successful civil action for breach of statutory duty and negligence, the main defences available and the procedure for assessment of damages under civil law.

In part (a) many candidates gained marks for clearly outlining the defences available. Although duty not breached was included in many answers, some candidates missed the opportunity to gain a mark by omitting 'reasonableness'. A few candidates missed opportunities to gain marks by only listing defences instead of outlining each one.

For part (b) some candidates had difficulty differentiating between general and special damages leading to answers that contained a mixture of considerations. Better answers did outline one or two relevant considerations, while limited answers focused on special damages and omitted any future considerations.

Question 5   Multi-causality theories recognise that accidents can have multiple causes.

(a)   (i)   **Outline** why multi-causality theories are used in accident investigation.   **(2)**

(ii)   **Outline** possible *limitations* of multi-causality theories in accident investigation.   **(2)**

(b)   **Explain** why accident data should be recorded by an organisation.   **(6)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 5.1: Outline theories/models and use of loss causation techniques; 5.2: Explain the use of quantitative methods in analysing loss data; and 5.3: Explain the significance and use of statutory and internal reporting of loss events.

In part (a) (i) answers were limited, although candidates were able to outline at least one reason for the use of multi-causality theories such as identification of root causes. For part (a) (ii) the limitations were not well discussed. Answers seem to focus on models being complex and expensive, for example. Some candidates strayed away from the question, stating for example that if an accident was not investigated quickly enough then the models may not work, or that the organisation may choose to ignore the outcome therefore making the exercise pointless.

In part (b) reasons provided for recording accident data were variable. Most answers cited legal requirements and trend analysis for example, but more complex reasons such as prioritising actions or performance review against objectives were rarely covered.

Question 6   (a)   **Outline TWO** principles of the following risk management strategies **AND give ONE** example of **EACH** strategy:

(i)   risk transfer;   **(3)**

(ii)   risk reduction.   **(3)**

(b)   When applying a risk *reduction* strategy, **outline** factors that affect the choice of risk control measures.   **(4)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 8.1: Explain the use of common risk management strategies; and 8.2: Outline factors to be taken into account when selecting risk controls.

In part (a) (i) many candidates gained marks for outlining the principle of shifting responsibility to third party and giving a relevant example. Few candidates considered other principles. However, some answers to part (ii) lacked clarity in relation to the principle and the examples given. With both parts in (a) some candidates missed the opportunity to gain marks by outlining only one principle and giving more than one example – the latter not gaining more marks. Additionally, some candidates adopted a widespread approach when providing examples to both parts in (a) for which marks were gained but did not necessarily demonstrate a clear understanding of the concepts explored in this question.

In part (b) some candidates appeared to misinterpret the question and gave an outline of either a hierarchy of control or the principles of prevention. Other candidates missed the opportunity to gain marks by omitting many considerations such as cost, practicability and meeting legal requirements.

Question 7 A logistics organisation owns a two-storey warehouse that is in regular use for storing equipment. The building has fallen into a state of disrepair and there is a large hole in the upper floor, through which it is possible to fall down to ground level. Signs with 'Danger – no entry' have been placed on the ground floor by each of the two staircases. Despite this, their employees still have access.

The logistics organisation uses a security firm whose employees also regularly enter the warehouse. The security firm has reported signs of unlawful entry.

This has both civil and criminal implications.

(a) **Outline** the relevant duties under the Occupiers' Liability Act 1984 **OR** Occupiers' Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 that may apply to this scenario. **(8)**

Use case law to support your answer.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has visited the warehouse and has decided to prosecute due to the significant risk present.

(b) (i) With reference to possible breaches of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, **outline** the *specific legal requirements* that may have been breached. **(5)**

(ii) **Explain** which of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 may have been contravened, **AND give** a reason in **EACH** case. **(4)**

(iii) **Identify** the criminal court that may hear a prosecution. **(1)**

(iv) **Identify** the possible penalties should either of the two organisations and/or their managers be found guilty. **(2)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 3.1: Explain the key requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999; and 4.3: Outline the main civil law statutory duties owed by the occupier of premises to lawful and unlawful visitors.

In part (a) candidates outlined the duties under the Occupier Liability Act 1984 to varying levels. Many answers recognised a duty to trespassers and that warning signs could help to discharge duties of care. However, many missed the opportunity to expand and fully outline the circumstances in which the duties are owed and how it could be discharged in relation to the scenario. Some candidates included responsibilities relating to children, which was not required.

In part (b) (i) candidates were able to outline legal requirement that may have been breached such as the general duty owed by the organisations to their employees. However, many candidates gave limited answers by simply requoting all of Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and missing the opportunity to consider other relevant requirements, such as duties owed to non-employees and offences by the body corporate.

In part (b) (ii) many candidates limited their answers to outlining risk assessment and principles of prevention but omitted other relevant requirements under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulation 1999. The reasons given were often a statement of the law that had been breached without giving a practical reason linked to the scenario. Better answers provided a wider range of requirements.

In part (b) (iii) most candidates correctly identified the criminal court, however occasionally a civil court answer was given.

In part (b) (iv) several candidates missed the opportunity to gain marks by not distinguishing between penalties for individuals and organisations; for example, an individual fine and an organisational fine have clear differences.

Question 8 An office is protected with an automatic fire detection and alarm system. A number of false alarms have been activated. A false alarm can be triggered by sunlight striking a UV flame detector, dust obscuring a smoke detector or by a failure of the primary power supply. The primary power is normally supplied by connection to the mains electricity. If this should fail, a back-up generator activates to supply the electricity.

The expected probabilities of the causes of the false alarms are shown below:

Cause of false alarm	Probability
Mains electricity failure	0.15
Dust obscuring a smoke detector	0.1
Sunlight striking a UV flame detector	0.25
Back-up generator does not start	0.04

(a)   **Outline** the principles of fault tree analysis. **(2)**

(b)   **Outline** the technique of fault tree analysis. **(8)**

(c)   Using a simple fault tree and the data above, **calculate** the probability of a false alarm. **(6)**

  Show calculations to support your answers.

(d)   (i)   **Identify** the main cause of false alarms. **(1)**

  (ii)   **Outline** remedial actions that could minimise false alarms. **(3)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 7.4: Explain the analysis, assessment and improvement of system failures and system reliability with the use of calculations.

In parts (a) and (b) candidates missed the opportunity to gain many marks by not sufficiently outlining the principles and technique of fault tree. Better answers included points such as outlining that the top event needed to be determined to carry out an analysis of causes based on AND and OR gates. Limited answers considered issues such as the team doing the analysis and the paperwork behind an investigation rather than the actual format of FTA, which was not what the question asked.

In part (c) most candidates presented the fault tree diagram correctly and carried out the calculation accurately, gaining maximum marks. The occasional multiplication rather than adding or vice versa was noted.

In part (d) (i) most candidates gained marks for correctly identifying main cause of a false alarm and also for outlining the remedial actions with reasonable suggestions in (ii).

Question 9   The management of an organisation intends to introduce new, safer working procedures.

(a)   **Outline** practical measures that management could take to communicate effectively when managing this change.   **(10)**

(b)   *Other than* effective communication, **outline** ways in which management could gain the support and commitment of employees when managing this change.   **(10)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 9.7: Explain health and safety culture and climate; and 9.8: Outline the factors which can both positively and negatively affect health and safety culture and climate.

In part (a) candidates gained marks for outlining a range of practical communication measures such as different types of meetings and noticeboards. However, many candidates missed the opportunity to gain marks by focusing on specific verbal or organisational communication issues and not offering a breadth of practical measures. Other limited answers focused on why communication is important and barriers to communications, how to get support for the new working procedures, or providing too much information on one measure or many examples of the same measure, which did not gain additional marks. Better answers demonstrated the required breadth of communication techniques.

In part (b) candidates gained marks for outlining a range of techniques that management could deploy such as demonstration of management commitment and allocation of resources. Some answers provided too much general discussion on the individual rather than practical methods. For example, stating that management should be approachable, adaptable, ready to listen, rather than giving a set of ten specific areas to advise on. There was also a lack of consideration of the process before the change happens, such as staff surveys, trials and finding out the reasons for change.

Candidates should be encouraged to ensure that the breadth of their answer is commensurate with the mark allocation. In this case, there were 10 marks for each part, signposting that ten mark worthy items were needed. Therefore, providing much less or lengthy discussion on a limited number of points is not going to allow for gaining marks.

Question 10 (a) **Explain** the objectives of:

        (i)   active health and safety monitoring; **(5)**

        (ii)   reactive health and safety monitoring. **(4)**

(b) **Outline** a range of *active* health and safety monitoring methods. **(5)**

(c) **Outline** examples of *reactive* performance data that could be used to benchmark health and safety performance. **(6)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 6.2: Explain the need for, and the objectives and limitations of, health and safety monitoring; and 6.3: Describe the variety of health and safety monitoring and measurement techniques.

Part (a) required an explanation of the *objectives* of the two types of health and safety monitoring. Answers were generally limited in the breadth of points covered. Few answers considered the organisational objectives in performance monitoring or looking at how a system operates in practice. Likewise, for reactive measures there was often no consideration of historic performance measurement and deviations from procedures. Some candidates appeared to misunderstand the core differences between the objectives of the two types of monitoring or outlined the natures of the monitoring types rather than the objectives.

In part (b) most candidates were able to clearly identify a suitable range of monitoring methods but some missed the opportunity to gain marks by not giving an accurate outline of suitable depth. Often the answer was a repeat of the heading rather than actual discussion; for example, stating that safety inspections are where a workplace is inspected. Better answers provided correct and succinct outlines of a range of appropriate methods.

In part (c) there was a similar issue to that in part (b). Many candidates were able to give suitable performance data but did not adequately outline their application to benchmarking.

A tendency to list rather than to outline was common to limited answers. Candidates should be encouraged to respond appropriately to the command word to gain marks.

Question 11 (a) **Outline** the meaning of the following terms in the context of controlling human error in the workplace:

(i) ergonomics; **(2)**

(ii) anthropometry; **(2)**

(iii) task analysis. **(2)**

(b) *Other than* ergonomic issues, **outline** ways in which human reliability in the workplace may be improved. In your answer, consider:

(i) individual; **(4)**

(ii) job; **(4)**

(iii) organisational. **(6)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 10.6: Explain how job factors can contribute to improving human reliability.

In part (a) most candidates gained some marks for outlining the meaning of the three terms. Ergonomics and task analysis appeared to be better understood than anthropometry. However, many candidates missed out on the opportunity to gain full marks by not making the link to controlling human error in the workplace.

In part (b) candidates outlined some reasonable ways for improving human reliability in the workplace. Often, answers were limited due to incorrect alignment with the categories of individual, job and organisation or not providing enough different points with each sub-part of the question. Candidates should be mindful that the marks available for a question part is indicative of the number of separate mark worthy points required. Part (b) (iii) had a greater mark allocation than (i) and (ii), yet candidates often limited their answers to a short paragraph containing one or two points.

Examination technique

The following issues are consistently identified as the main areas in need of improvement for candidates undertaking Diploma level qualifications:

Candidates misread/misinterpreted the question

NEBOSH questions are systematically and carefully prepared and are subject to a number of checks and balances prior to being authorised for use in question papers. These checks include ensuring that questions set for the Diploma level qualifications relate directly to the learning outcomes contained within the associated syllabus guides. The learning outcomes require candidates to be sufficiently prepared to provide the relevant depth of answer across a broad range of topic areas. For example, a candidate could be asked about the causes of stress, or could be asked about the effects of stress, a question could require a response relating to the principles of fire initiation, or a question could require a response relating to the spread of fire. Therefore, a candidate should focus not only on the general topic area (eg stress, fire), but also the specific aspect of that topic to which the question relates.

Examiners suggest that while many candidates do begin their answer satisfactorily and perhaps gain one or two marks, they then lose sight of the question and include irrelevant information. Although further points included in an answer can relate to the general topic area, these points are not focused on the specific learning outcome and marks cannot be awarded. However, some candidates appear to misread or misinterpret several questions. This situation is more likely due to candidates preparing for the examination with a number of stock answers obtained through rote-learning, that again can provide answers that are loosely associated with the topic matter but do not provide answers specific to the question. Such an approach is clearly evident to an Examiner and demonstrates little understanding of the topic matter and marks are not awarded.

Examiners noted a tendency on the part of many candidates to write about things that were not asked for, despite the fact that guidance as to what to cover had been given in the question. An example is a question where candidates were instructed that there was no need to make reference to specific control measures and yet did so. In another example candidates wrote about selection of PPE when the question wording had clearly stated that this had already been undertaken. Another example was where candidates wrote about barriers to rehabilitation without relating them to the bio-psychosocial model, even though the question specifically asked them to do this.

Some candidates wrote large amounts of text on a single topic where only one mark could be awarded. Candidates did not recognise that the amount of marks awarded to each section gives an indication of the depth of the answer required.

It would therefore appear that a sizeable number of candidates misread some of the questions, to their disadvantage. This should be a relatively easy pitfall to overcome; candidates should ensure that they make full use of the 10 minutes reading time to understand what each question requires. Candidates are advised to allow sufficient time to read and re-read the question in order to determine the key requirements. Underlining or highlighting key words can assist in keeping focused and simple mind maps or answer plans can also be useful. An answer plan will often be helpful in ensuring that all aspects of the question are attended to; maps and plans should be kept simple so as not to use up too much examination time; if all aspects are not dealt with it will be difficult to gain a high mark. Candidates should not assume when they see a question that it is exactly the same as one that they may have seen in the past; new questions are introduced and old questions are amended. It is therefore of the utmost importance that questions are read carefully and the instructions that they give are followed.

It may help if, when preparing for the examinations, candidates write out their answers in full and ask a tutor or other knowledgeable third party to mark their work. In so doing, issues with understanding can be noted and remedial action taken.

Course providers and candidates should note that various means are used to draw attention to keywords in examination questions. These means include emboldened and italicised text and the use of words in capitals. These means are intended to draw the candidate's attention to these words and this emphasis should then be acted upon when making a response. These devices can often assist in giving guidance on how to set out an answer to maximise the marks gained. For example: **Identify THREE** things to be considered **AND** for **EACH**…..

Candidates often have a reasonable body of knowledge and understanding on the topic covered by a question, but they have not been able to apply this to the examination question being asked. This could be because sufficient time has not been taken to read the question, noting the words being emphasised.

When preparing candidates for examination, or offering advice on examination technique, accredited course providers should stress that understanding the question requirements and the sub-structure of the response to the question is the fundamental step to providing a correct answer. Rather than learning the 'ideal answer' to certain questions effort would be better spent in guided analysis on what a question requires. The rote learning of answers appears to close the candidates' minds to the wider (and usually correct) possibilities.

Candidates repeated the same point but in different ways

There are instances where candidates repeat very similar points in their answers, sometimes a number of times. This is easily done in the stressful environment of the examination. However, once a point has been successfully made and a mark awarded for it, that mark cannot be awarded again for similar points made later in the answer. In some cases, particularly where questions had more than one part, candidates gave an answer to, say, part (b) of a question in part (a), meaning that they needed to repeat themselves in part (b) thus wasting time.

One possible reason for this might be that candidates have relatively superficial knowledge of the topic - a view supported by the low marks evident in some answers. It appears that, faced with a certain number of marks to achieve and knowing that more needs to be written, but without detailed knowledge, candidates appear to opt to rephrase that which they have already written in the hope that it may gain further marks. Another possible reason is a failure to properly plan answers, especially to the Section B questions - it would appear that candidates sometimes become 'lost' in their answers, forgetting what has already been written. It may be due either to a lack of knowledge (so having no more to say) or to limited answer planning, or to a combination of the two. When a valid point has been made it will be credited, but repetition of that point will receive no further marks. Candidates may have left the examination room feeling that they had written plenty when in fact they had repeated themselves on multiple occasions, therefore gaining fewer marks than they assumed.

Candidates sometimes think they have written a lengthy answer to a question and are therefore deserving of a good proportion of the marks. Unfortunately, quantity is not necessarily an indicator of quality and sometimes candidates make the same point several times in different ways. Examiners are not able to award this same mark in the mark scheme a second time. The chance of repetition increases when all marks for a question (eg 10 or 20) are available in one block. It can also happen when a significant proportion of the marks are allocated to one part of a question.

This issue is most frequently demonstrated by candidates who did not impose a structure on their answers. Starting each new point on a new line would assist in preventing candidates from repeating a basic concept previously covered, as well as helping them assess whether they have covered enough information for the available marks.

As with the previous area for improvement ('misreading the question') writing an answer plan where points can be ticked off when made, or structuring an answer so that each point made is clearly shown, for example by underlining key points, can be of great use. This technique aids candidates and makes it much clearer in the stress of the examination for candidates to see which points have been made and reduce the chances of the same point being made several times. Course providers are encouraged to set written work and to provide feedback on written answers, looking to see that candidates are able to come up with a broad range of relevant and accurate points; they should point out to candidates where the same point is being made more than once.

Candidates are advised to read widely. This means reading beyond course notes in order to gain a fuller understanding of the topic being studied. In that way, candidates will know more and be able to produce a broader and more detailed answer in the examination. Candidates may also find it helpful to read through their answers as they write them in order to avoid repetition of points.

Course providers should provide examination technique pointers and practice as an integral part of the course exercises. Technique as much as knowledge uptake should be developed, particularly as many candidates may not have taken formal examinations for some years.

Candidates produced an incoherent answer

Candidates produced answers that lacked structure, digressed from the question asked and were often incoherent as a result. In many cases, there seemed to be a scatter gun approach to assembling an answer, which made that answer difficult to follow. Answers that lack structure and logic are inevitably more difficult to follow than those that are well structured and follow a logical approach. Those candidates who prepare well for the unit examination and who therefore have a good and detailed knowledge commensurate with that expected at Diploma level, invariably supply structured, coherent answers that gain good marks; those candidates who are less well prepared tend not to do so.

Having good written communication skills and the ability to articulate ideas and concepts clearly and concisely are important aspects of the health and safety practitioner's wider competence. Candidates should be given as much opportunity as possible to practice their writing skills and are advised to practice writing out answers in full during the revision phase. This will enable them to develop their knowledge and to demonstrate it to better effect during the examination. It may help if candidates ask a person with no health and safety knowledge to review their answers and to see whether the reviewer can understand the points being made.

Candidates did not respond effectively to the command word

A key indicator in an examination question will be the command word, which is always given in **bold** typeface. The command word will indicate the depth of answer that is expected by the candidate.

Generally, there has been an improvement in response to command words, but a number of candidates continue to produce answers that are little more than a list even when the command word requires a more detailed level of response, such as 'outline' or 'explain'. This is specifically addressed in the following section dealing with command words, most commonly failure to provide sufficient content to constitute an 'outline' was noted. Failure to respond to the relevant command word in context was also a frequent problem hence information inappropriate to the question was often given.

Course exercises should guide candidates to assessing the relevant points in any given scenario such that they are able to apply the relevant syllabus elements within the command word remit.

Candidate's handwriting was illegible

It is unusual to have to comment on this aspect of candidate answers, as experienced Examiners rarely have difficulties when reading examination scripts. However, Examiners have independently identified and commented on this as an area of concern. While it is understood that candidates feel under pressure in an examination and are unlikely to produce examination scripts in a handwriting style that is representative of their usual written standards; it is still necessary for candidates to produce a script that gives them the best chance of gaining marks. This means that the Examiners must be able to read all the written content.

Some simple things may help to overcome handwriting issues. Using answer planning and thinking time, writing double-line spaced, writing in larger text size than usual, using a suitable type of pen, perhaps trying out some different types of pens, prior to the examination. In addition, it is important to practise hand writing answers in the allocated time, as part of the examination preparation and revision. Today, few of us hand-write for extended periods of time on a regular basis, as electronic communication and keyboard skills are so widely used. Accredited course providers should encourage and give opportunities for candidates to practise this hand-writing skill throughout their course of study. They should identify at an early stage if inherent problems exist. These can sometimes be accommodated through reasonable adjustments, eg by the provision of a scribe or the use of a keyboard. Candidates with poorly legible handwriting need to understand this constraint early in their course of studies in order for them to minimise the effect this may have.

NEBOSH recommends to accredited course providers that candidates undertaking this qualification should reach a minimum standard of English equivalent to an International English Language Testing System score of 7.0 or higher in IELTS tests in order to be accepted onto a Diploma level programme.

For further information please see the latest version of the IELTS Handbook or consult the IELTS website: https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format

Candidates wishing to assess their own language expertise may consult the IELTS website for information on taking the test: http://www.ielts.org

Course providers are reminded that they must ensure that these standards are satisfied or additional tuition provided to ensure accessible and inclusive lifelong learning.

Candidates did not answer all the questions

It has been noted that a number of candidates do not attempt all of the questions on the examination and of course where a candidate does not provide an answer to a question, no marks can be awarded. Missing out whole questions immediately reduces the number of possible marks that can be gained and so immediately reduces the candidate's opportunity for success. There can be several reasons for this issue: running out of the allocated time for the examination, a lack of sufficient knowledge necessary to address parts of some questions, or in other cases, some candidates have a total lack of awareness that the topic covered in certain questions is even in the syllabus.

If candidates have not fully studied the breadth of the syllabus they may find they are not then equipped to address some of the questions that are on a question paper. At that late stage there is little a candidate can do to address this point. Responsibility for delivering and studying the full breadth of the syllabus rests with both the course provider and the individual candidates and both must play their part to ensure candidates arrive at the examination with a range of knowledge across all areas of the syllabus.

Lack of technical knowledge required at Diploma level

In Section A, candidates must attempt all questions and it was clear that some struggled with those requiring more detailed and technical knowledge. For example, it is not acceptable that at Diploma level, candidates have no knowledge of the principles of good practice that underpin COSHH. Unfortunately this was often found to be the case in responses to questions.

In Section B, where candidates have a choice of questions, many sought to avoid those questions with a higher technical knowledge content. For example questions on radiation, lighting and vibration. Practitioners operating at Diploma level need to be confident with the technical content of the whole syllabus and this does require a significant amount of private study, particularly in these areas of the syllabus that are perhaps less familiar to them in their own workplace situations.

Candidates provided rote-learned responses that did not fit the question

It was apparent in those questions that were similar to those previously set, that the candidates' thought processes were constrained by attachment to memorised answer schemes that addressed different question demands.

While knowledge of material forms a part of the study for a Diploma-level qualification, a key aspect being assessed is a candidate's **understanding** of the topic and reciting a pre-prepared and memorised answer will not show a candidate's understanding. In fact, if a candidate gives a memorised answer to a question that may look similar, but actually is asking for a different aspect of a topic in the syllabus, it shows a lack of understanding of the topic and will inevitably result in low marks being awarded for that answer.

Command words

Please note that the examples used here are for the purpose of explanation only.

The following command words are listed in the order identified as being the most challenging for candidates:

Explain

Explain: To provide an understanding. To make an idea or relationship clear.

This command word requires a demonstration of an understanding of the subject matter covered by the question. Superficial answers are frequently given, whereas this command word demands greater detail. For example, candidates are occasionally able to outline a legal breach but do not always explain why it had been breached. A number of instances of candidates simply providing a list of information suggests that while candidates probably have the correct understanding, they cannot properly express it. Whether this is a reflection of the candidate's language abilities, in clearly constructing a written explanation, or if it is an outcome of a limited understanding or recollection of their teaching, is unclear. It may be linked to a general societal decline in the ability to express clearly explained concepts in the written word, but this remains a skill that health and safety professionals are frequently required to demonstrate.

When responding to an 'explain' command word it is helpful to present the response as a logical sequence of steps. Candidates must also be guided by the number of marks available. When asked to '**explain** the purposes of a thorough examination and test of a local exhaust ventilation system' for 5 marks, this should indicate a degree of detail is required and there may be several parts to the explanation.

Candidates are often unable to explain their answers in sufficient detail or appear to become confused about what they want to say as they write their answer. For example, in one question many candidates explained the difference between the types of sign, explaining colours and shapes of signs without explaining how they could be used in the depot, as required by the question.

Describe

Describe: To give a detailed written account of the distinctive features of a subject. The account should be factual without any attempt to explain.

The command word 'describe' clearly requires a description of something. The NEBOSH guidance on command words says that 'describe' requires a detailed written account of the distinctive features of a subject such that another person would be able to visualise what was being described. Candidates have a tendency to confuse 'describe' with 'outline'. This means that less detailed answers are given that inevitably lead to lower marks. This may indicate a significant lack of detailed knowledge and/or a lack of ability to articulate the course concepts clearly. Candidates should aim to achieve a level of understanding that enables them to describe key concepts.

Some candidates see the command word 'describe' as an opportunity to fill out an answer with irrelevant detail. If a person was asked to describe the chair they were sitting on, they would have little difficulty in doing so and would not give general unconnected information about chairs in general, fill a page with everything they know about chairs or explain why they were sitting on the chair. Candidates should consider the general use of the command word when providing examination answers.

Outline

Outline: To indicate the principal features or different parts of.

This is probably the most common command word but most candidates treat it like 'identify' and provide little more than a bullet pointed list. As the NEBOSH guidance on command words makes clear, 'outline' is not the same as 'identify' so candidates will be expected to give more detail in their answers. 'Outline' requires a candidate to indicate *'the principal features or different parts of'* the subject of the question.

An outline is more than a simple list, but does not require an exhaustive description. Instead, the outline requires a brief summary of the major aspects of whatever is stated in the question. 'Outline' questions

usually require a range of features or points to be included and often 'outline' responses can lack sufficient breadth, so candidates should also be guided by the number of marks available. Those candidates who gain better marks in questions featuring this command word give brief summaries to indicate the principal features or different parts of whatever was being questioned. If a question asks for an outline of the precautions when maintaining an item of work equipment, reference to isolation, safe access and personal protective equipment would not be sufficient on their own to gain the marks available. A suitable outline would include the meaning of isolation, how to achieve safe access and the types of protective clothing required.

Identify

Identify: To give a reference to an item, which could be its name or title.

Candidates responding to identify questions usually provide a sufficient answer. Examiners will use the command word 'identify' when they require a brief response and in most cases, one or two words will be sufficient and further detail will not be required to gain the marks. If a question asks '**identify** typical symptoms of visual fatigue', then a response of 'eye irritation' is sufficient to gain 1 mark. If having been asked to identify something and further detail is needed, then a second command word may be used in the question.

However, in contrast to 'outline' answers being too brief, many candidates feel obliged to expand 'identify' answers into too much detail, with the possible perception that more words equals more marks. This is not the case and course providers should use the NEBOSH guidance on command words within their examination preparation sessions in order to prepare candidates for the command words that may arise.

Give

Give: To provide short, factual answers.

'Give' is usually in a question together with a further requirement, such as '**give** the meaning of' or '**give** an example in **EACH** case'. Candidates tend to answer such questions satisfactorily, especially where a question might ask to 'identify' something and then 'give' an example. The candidate who can answer the first part, invariably has little difficulty in giving the example.

Comment

Comment: To give opinions (with justification) on an issue or statement by considering the issues relevant to it.

For example, if candidates have already calculated two levels of the exposure to wood dust and are then asked to comment on this the issues would include the levels of exposure they had found, and candidates would need to give their opinion on these, while considering what is relevant. The question guides on what may be relevant for example, did it meet the legal requirements, did it suggest controls were adequate, so based on that guidance, did exposure need to be reduced further or did anything else need to be measured or considered? If candidates comment with justification on each of these areas they would gain good marks in that part of question.

Few candidates are able to respond appropriately to this command word. At Diploma level, candidates should be able to give a clear, reasoned opinion based on fact.

For additional guidance, please see NEBOSH's *'Guidance on command words used in learning outcomes and question papers'* document, which is available on our website: https://www.nebosh.org.uk/i-am/a-student/ - from this page the document can be found by clicking on the relevant Qualification link, then on the 'Resources' tab.